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# Women, Marriage, and the Market Economy in Rural Uzbekistan: Cases from a Pastoral Area of Kashkadarya Province

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# Women, Marriage, and the Market Economy in Rural Uzbekistan:

## Cases from a Pastoral Area of Kashkadarya Province

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**Keywords:** woman, family, marriage, rural Uzbekistan, market economy

### ■ Introduction

This paper attempts to show the relationship among women's lives, marriage, and the market economy in contemporary rural Uzbekistan. More specifically, I focus on the process of marriage and how it has changed—from the perspective of the transition to a market economy, namely, the increased presence of money and manufactured goods in the rural population's everyday life.

The outline of this paper is as follows. First, I present an overview of previous studies concerned with the Soviet modernization of women and the transition to a market economy. Next, I describe the research area in Kashkadarya province. Third, based on field data, I examine the current marriage process in the region and the changes it has undergone. Finally, I share my conclusions.

### ■ 1. Paper's Viewpoint: Reproduction of Women's Role in the Home

During the Soviet period, women began to work outside their homes. However, as recent studies on the Soviet modernization of women have indicated, even though women became workers, they were still expected to serve as mothers and wives at home. In other words, Soviet modernization did not reach the sphere of the home, and this situation continues till today.

The government of the Soviet Union tried to establish socialism in Central Asia, a backward area where patriarchy was the chief obstacle. Therefore, to advance socialism, the government attempted to emancipate women oppressed by patriarchal households; however, viewpoints differ. Insistence that women should be emancipated was the *official* reason; the original, underlying intention was to increase productivity via women's empowerment.

In the 1920s, the department of women (*Zhenotdel*) was established in some areas, and many women belonged to clubs whose members were enlightened local women. Moreover, the government established factories for women. Among these policies toward women, *Hujum*<sup>1</sup> was an incident worthy of mention. Beginning in 1927, *Hujum* aimed to achieve complete emancipation of women. *Hujum* was a campaign to rid women of the veil (*paranji* in Uzbek), which the government regarded as a symbol of women's oppression. However, *Hujum* was suspended after two years; men who opposed getting rid of the veil used violence against women who actually unveiled themselves. *Hujum* could not be accomplished overnight. Instead, women entered the public sphere gradually. During the outbreak of World War II, however, women rapidly became workers when men were sent to the front.

Nevertheless, differences remained in occupation and the content of work according to gender. Women worked mainly as teachers, doctors, nurses, and unskilled workers. For example, Kamp showed that at a farm in the suburbs of Shahrizabz, men worked in the fields, but women worked at a silk mill or an embroidery factory [Kamp 2006: 220]. Keller observed that men decided the work's content; women seldom managed a farm or a factory [Keller 1998: 21]. Furthermore, women had to perform domestic

<sup>1</sup> *Hujum* means "attack" in the Uzbek language.

chores and care for the children; consequently, they were forced to shoulder a double burden. Obiya [2012] quoted Tokhtakhodzhaeva's description of a woman losing an unborn baby, because even nine months into her pregnancy, she was forced to do fieldwork to achieve the *norma* [Tokhtakhodzhaeva 2000].

After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, gender equality was denied by the new system. Simultaneously, the transition to a market economy increased the importance of money in daily lives. Women continued to shoulder the double burden, but now to earn sufficient money for their households. Kandiyoti suggested that the handsome Soviet social security, a new type of patriarchy, preferred women not to be emancipated. After the paternalistic Soviet system collapsed, women began to adapt themselves to traditional patriarchy reevaluated under the new system [Kandiyoti 2007]. For women, marriage is an important safety net that provides them social and economic security. In the current situation, traditional values still dictate that young women should marry.

In this paper, I aim to clarify the current method of reproduction of traditional values regarding women and the family, maintained throughout the Soviet period, from the perspective of the transition to a market economy in rural areas.

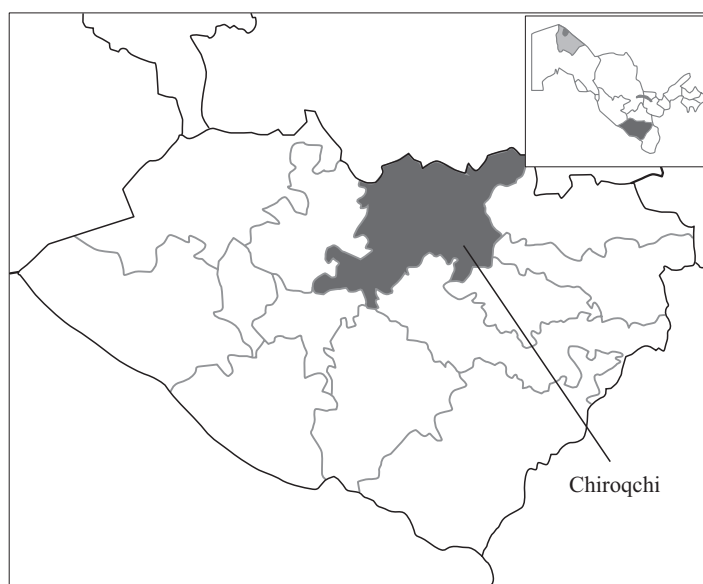
## ■ 2. Transition to Market Economy and Changing Life in Rural Areas

I focus on the transition to a market economy for the following reasons. According to preceding studies, on the one hand, the transition to a market economy following Uzbekistan's independence made people's lives difficult in rural areas. Researchers have described how people coped with poverty through social networks [Hiwatari 2008; Kandiyoti 1998]. I conducted field research from 2010 to 2011, 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I saw that local bazaars were expanding and increasing in number each year. Then, I realized that the transition to a market economy, in one respect, has brought material wealth to rural living. Of course, people continue to have needs, and problems remain in the living environment. However, since Uzbekistan gained independence, residents of rural areas can engage in economic activity relatively freely, and more commodities are available at local bazaars. In other words, residents can live a life of abundance if they earn enough money. This is the current state of life in rural areas, as the living environment has changed in the 20 years since the Soviet Union's collapse. I argue that we can clearly see how traditional values regarding women have been maintained in the new living situation by focusing on the relationship between the prevailing market economy and the process of marriage.

## ■ 3. Outline of Field Research

In the west central part of Chiroqchi district, Kashkadarya province, I conducted field research from May 2010 to November 2011. During this time, I lived in a settlement in Chiroqchi district, where I researched conditions of carpet weaving and women's lives.

The settlement where I lived is about 45 kilometers northwest of Chiroqchi city center. According to village residents, their families were originally hunters and cattle breeders. In 1938, Andreev kolkhoz was established. People started to settle down in places where they now live. In 1954, Andreev kolkhoz was reorganized into *Voshot Sovkhoz*, where, mainly, *qaraqli* sheep were bred. Additionally, I suspect that a certain number of people in the settlement came to work as members of the *Sovkhoz* during the Soviet period.



map

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Voshot Sovkhoz* was privatized, and now people earn a living by securing multiple incomes. Breeding and selling livestock serves as the main income for family budgets. The average family size in the settlement is five or six people, and a family seems to need about 150,000 per month to live. People need cash to buy vegetables, fruit, processed food, and clothing; they pay their cell phone bills in the local bazaar. In addition, weddings and circumcision ceremonies require many foodstuffs and gifts for guests, which can place a heavy financial burden on families.

## ■ 4. Outline of Marriage

### (1) The circumstances of marriage through household research

I would like to explain the circumstances of marriage in the area through household research.<sup>2</sup> For this research, 248 women older than 16 (age of beginning secondary education), who had not entered higher education, were selected. In the research area, the average age at which a woman first marries is about 18. In terms of education, two women of the 248 surveyed had obtained higher education,<sup>3</sup> 32 had secondary technical education, 206 had received compulsory education (11-year system), and 6 had not finished compulsory education.

Also for this research, 239 men were selected. Of them, 29 had a higher education, 48 had secondary technical education, 147 had received compulsory education, and 6 had not finished compulsory education. According to these results, both men and women generally received compulsory education. However, two times more men than women received secondary technical education and higher education.

The author never heard anyone in the research area remark that women should not receive education. Actually, women who received higher education were proud of studying at *institut*, and people seemed to think that educated women, “*o‘qigan qiz*,” could find good partners despite their “advanced” age. In other words, people want their sons and daughters to receive an education from a *koreji* or *institut*, but these schools are expensive, so parents tend to provide their sons higher education, especially because

<sup>2</sup> I conducted household research from June to November 2010. I gathered basic data from 143 households (909 people, 466 males, 443 females). I visited every household and, as I completed a questionnaire, asked questions (family members’ names, dates of members’ births, occupations, private cultivated land, numbers of livestock, and existence of any rug producers).

<sup>3</sup> Uzbekistan’s educational system following: The term of compulsory education is 9 years, but an 11-year elementary-secondary education school, *Maktab*, also exists. The latter part of secondary education is *koreji* or *litsey* (2- or 3-year system). After secondary education, there is higher education or *institut*.

sons (usually the youngest) must take responsibility for the family.

Women graduate from the 11-year system at around 18 years old. So, in the research area, they tend to marry after graduating. People sometimes view marrying young as a problem, but generally speaking, marrying is a social duty, regardless of sex. However, this is especially the case for women, who cannot live alone. In short, the belief is that women must marry to live in the area.

## (2) The process of marriage

### 1). Sending a go-between (*sovchi kuzatish*)

The marriage process begins when parents ask their son, “Is there anyone you like?” If the son does have someone he likes, his parents collect information about the young woman (e.g., her family’s reputation, her appearance, and her character). They consider her suitability for their son. If the son does not have anyone he likes, his parents rely on their relatives or acquaintances. When the parents have decided on the bride, someone from the groom’s concerned—*sovchi* in Uzbek—visits the bride’s family. On the first visit, the bride’s father generally tells the *sovchi* that he would like to ask his daughter. On the second visit, he tells the *sovchi* that he would like to consult his relatives. Finally, he tells the *sovchi* to plan the wedding ceremony. When the bride’s father accepts the marriage offer, the proposal is finalized. Bride’s and groom’s families talk about, for instance, the rough date of the marriage, the number of ceremonies, and the gifts to be exchanged. The scale of the marriage ceremony depends on the economic power of the bride’s and groom’s families.

### 2). The wedding ceremony

If a relative (grandfather or grandmother) has died within the past few years, a mourning ceremony, in Uzbek called “*ro‘mol tashlash* (scarf throwing),” is held. This ceremony is small, just for close relatives. Furthermore, if the groom’s family has the budget for it, they present a gold ring or earrings to the bride.

The engagement ceremony, called “*fotiha to‘yi*,” informs people that the couple plans to marry. The period from the engagement ceremony to the wedding ceremony varies. For example, Shahnoza had her engagement ceremony in August 2010. At the ceremony, the groom’s family told Shahnoza’s parents that the wedding ceremony would be held the next year. But after the engagement, the groom’s mother wanted the bride to begin housework as soon as possible, so the wedding ceremony was held in some haste in November 2010. In Gulhayo’s case, the wedding ceremony was held two years after the engagement ceremony because her fiancé went to work in Russia.

The ceremony held when the bride leaves her parents’ home is the “bride’s ceremony (*kelin to‘yi*).” As this ceremony approaches, the groom’s family makes a gift of cotton, with which the bride’s mother, relatives, and neighbors make cushions and bedding.<sup>4</sup> The two families discuss and decide, at least a month in advance, on the date for the wedding ceremony. After that, they distribute invitations (*to‘y bildirish*).

The day before the wedding ceremony, a casual ceremony is held at the bride’s home, with the bride’s school friends and near relatives invited. In the middle of this ceremony, a religious marriage ceremony is sometimes held. In this ceremony, the groom comes to the bride’s home, they enter a room decorated with the bride’s dowry items, and they lie in bed, pretending to sleep. Elderly women “wake” them by saying curious words. After that, the bride’s relatives give some small amount of money to participants from the groom’s side. This ceremony means that the bride and groom can sleep together. On this day, the groom returns to his home.

<sup>4</sup> The bride takes these things to the groom’s home. Generally in the research area, quilts and mattresses—10 each—are prepared for the dowry.

The next day, the groom comes to the bride's home to take her back to his home. They leave the bride's home and visit the square of Shahrisabz with their relatives and friends. After that, they go to the groom's home, and many people visit both families' homes to celebrate. When the bride arrives at the groom's home, the ceremony of the "bride's greeting (*kelin salom*)" is held. With her courtesy mother, called "*oldiga chiqqan inasi*," the bride bows to the women participants. After the bride's greeting, the ceremony is temporarily closed, and participants return to their homes. After dark, at the wedding feast (*vecher*), relatives and friends congratulate the families and dance to loud music.

### 3). Ceremonies after the wedding ceremony

The day after the wedding ceremony, a "face opening (*bit ochirish*)" is held. With her head and face covered with a large scarf, the bride enters the kitchen in the groom's home and stands on a transport bag. Then she sifts flour and cuts meat on a seat made from goat- or sheepskin (*po'stak*). Next, a child removes the bride's scarf with a stick; her "face is opened." After that, women from the groom's side present the bride with dishes and scarfs as gifts.

A period of 40 days after the wedding ceremony is called *chilla*, and during this time, the bride cannot return to her parents' home. After the 40 days of *chilla*, the *chimildiq olish* ceremony is held. In this ceremony, a *chimildiq*, hanging where the bride and groom sleep, is removed, indicating that the shame of the newly married couple sleeping together is removed.

Unless the bride is officially invited, she cannot visit her new relatives' homes. When part of the groom's family happens to be a neighbor, the bride sometimes goes there to borrow or lend cooking utensils, but she does not stay long. After her new relatives invite her, she can visit freely. This invitation is called the "bride's tea (*kelin choyi*)" and in this ceremony, the groom, the bride, and the host's relatives dine together.

### (3) Recognition of marriage

How does the process of marrying reflect recognition that marriage is a social duty? First, I explain from the perspective of the bride's and groom's families. During my research, I often heard that if the *sovchi* comes to a young woman's parents to propose a marriage, the parents generally accept the proposal even if they worry that their daughter is too young to marry. They believe it better to accept a proposal rather than reject it and risk not receiving any other offers. That is, if a young woman's parents decline a marriage proposal, they might be exposed to the risk that she will not be able to marry later because the proposed groom's family might speak ill of them. Therefore, I suspect that the bride's side wants a good marriage partner as the first proposal.

The groom's side focuses on whether the bride is a "good girl" or not, specifically, a girl who seldom goes out and does not wear jeans (wearing jeans is "city style"), a girl who wears a traditional one-piece and trousers, called *ko'ylak va ishton*. In particular, the social standing of the bride's father is important. Thus, a daughter and her father should practice being a traditional "good girl" and "good father" to attract a good groom. Conversely, the groom's side recognizes that a "good girl" might receive offers from other potential grooms. Therefore, they hurry to secure the engagement. In addition to hosting the marriage ceremony, the groom's family bears expenses of preparing a room or a house for the bride and groom, clothes for the bride, and so on. Recently, marriage ceremonies have become increasingly luxurious, and of course, expenses are also on the rise. I suspect that marriages are becoming more difficult for the bride's family in terms of social reputation and for the groom's family in terms of economic power.

In summary, there is competition in the selection of marriage partners. People believe they must hurry



to find a good partner. This competition, for the bride's family, is based on the fear that if they hold out too long, their daughter might miss the opportunity to secure a marriage and, thus, her livelihood. For the groom's family, competition is based on impatience; if they want to secure a good marriage partner, they have to enrich themselves economically in order to take a bride as soon as possible.

## ■ 5. Increasing Dowries and Pressures

### (1) Dowry content

People recognize that marriage ceremonies and dowries are becoming more munificent year by year. Tables 1 and 2 show a comparison of contents of a mother's dowry from 1980 (table 1) and another from her daughter in 2010 (table 2), although we must keep in mind that these lists are composed from the brides' recollections.

In comparison to the mother's marriage, when the daughter married, tea bowls, plates, cosmetics, baby

**Table 1. The dowries of Haytgul**

English	Uzbek	Number
Rug	Qattiq	2
Quilt	Ko'rpacha	5
Mattress	Ko'rpacha	6
Pillow	Yostiq	15, 16
Large oblong chest	Sandiq	1
Onepiece (with trousers)	Ko'ylak	10
Scarf	Ro'mol	10
Jacket	Jamper	1
Long robe	Xalat	4
Shoes	Tufli	2
Fabric	Material	14
Cap	Qalpoq	1

**Table 2. The dowries of Nasiba**

English	Uzbek	Number
Rug	Qattiq	2
	Qoqma	1
Carpet (machine weaving)	Magazin gilam	1
Quilt	Ko'rpacha	6
Mattress	Ko'rpacha	6
Pillow	Yostiq	2
Large oblong chest	Sandiq	1
Onepiece (with trousers)	Ko'ylak	10
Scarf	Ro'mol	10
Long robe	Xalat	4
Two-piece	Kostyum	1
Shoes	Tufli	6
Cap	Qalpoq	1
Bowl	Kosa	10
Teacup	Piyora	10
Plate (big)	Tovoq	10
Plate (small)	Tovoq	10
Blanket	Adyol	1
Cosmetics	Patnis	1set
Tablecloth	Dasturxon	1
Handkerchief	Sochoq	2
Cloth for baby	Bolalarga kiyim	1

clothes and machine-made carpets were becoming predominant. From these tables, we can also see that dowries are larger. New dowry items—tea bowls, plates, cosmetics, shoes, and carpets are ready-made, showing that people buy ready-made products and add to dowries due to their increasing opportunities to earn money. According to a man in his sixties, in the 1970s, marriage ceremonies were very simple. He remembered the bride just riding a horse and apple several participants. At this stage, I cannot verify changes in the marriage ceremony, but according to people's memories, it seems likely that marriage ceremonies are becoming more lavish.

### (2) Pressure on hosts

Holding marriage ceremonies is not a heavy expenditure just for the hosts (especially for groom's family). Families also worry about what the guests will say about the ceremony. But why do they worry about guests' evaluations? I believe this issue relates to marriage ceremonies becoming larger each year, fueled by the transition to a market economy. I illustrate this with the following case.

#### 1). The case of Abduqobil

First, I will clarify whether the case of Abduqobil's frustration is exemplifying the burden of holding marriage ceremonies. Abduqobil is Sharaf's<sup>5</sup> eldest son. I stayed at Sharaf's house during my field research. Sharaf, Abduqobil's father, had long worked as a teacher at a *maktab* in the settlement, and people

<sup>5</sup> Because I stayed at Sharaf's house during my field research, I could understand everyday life in the research area from living with his family and associating with his extended family.

trusted him and his family.

Abduqobil works as a police officer, drawing a salary of 400 dollars a month. In this area, his household income is above average. In November 2010, his elder daughter Shahlo married the son of a private farm owner in the neighboring settlement. The house she married into has directed the *sovhoz* for generations, and even now they have a large private farm. Thus, the household is one of the most eminent in the area. So, Abduqobil and his wife do not worry about their daughter's life with her in-laws because Shahlo's only work is to milk the cow. The year after she married, Shahlo had a baby boy. A *beshtik to'y*, a ceremony to wish the baby growth, was planned for November 15, Shahlo's birthday. Traditionally, the bride's parents pay the cost of the *beshtik to'y*, and prepare clothing, many toys, and so on for the baby. One day, Shahlo's father-in-law told Abduqobil that he wanted to bring forward the date of the *beshtik to'y*. Abduqobil and his wife replied that they would not have enough money in time for an earlier date.

Abduqobil complained to me about the hardships they faced due to Shahlo's marriage to a wealthier family. He said that this was not the first time he had been burdened financially. When he was preparing for the marriage, he went through great hardship to buy a large oblong chest, called a *sandiq*, for the dowry. One day, Abduqobil heard from the groom's family that they had bought a *sandiq*. Customarily, the bride and groom prepare the same type of *sandiq*. Therefore, Abduqobil and his wife went to a local bazaar to buy the same *sandiq*, but it was too expensive. After that, they looked in Chiroqchi and Shahrisabz cities, but they could not find the same one. Finally, they bought the same *sandiq* at Qarshi, the capital of Kashkadarya province. After Abduqobil told me this story, he added that he would marry his younger daughter Nargiza to a man of the same economic level as his family.

## 2). Remarks of Anora and Oysoat

Why did Abduqobil complain about preparations for the wedding and *beshtik to'y*? When female guests came to the marriage ceremony, they looked at the *sundiq* that Abduqobil had gone to so much trouble to acquire; the bedding, called *kurpa* or *kurpacha* in Uzbek; the decorated cushions on the *sandiq*; and the bride's clothing on the wall of the room for the bride and groom. At the marriage ceremony, Anora, Sharaf's younger son's wife, and I were shown into the room for the bride and groom. When we sat down, Anora told me that there were ten *kurupacha*, ten *kurupa*, two pillows, and four carpets. At the time, I did not understand why Anora counted the number of items in the dowry. Next, Anora confirmed the numbers with women sitting near her. Then, she told them that she finally understood the customs involved in attending a marriage ceremony. Anora was born in a settlement in Chiroqchi district and then, due to her father's work, lived in Tashkent until she was 12 years old. After that, her family returned to Chiroqchi district, beginning a new life in a different place.

Anora said that their new life had many hardships because her family was used to Tashkent life. Moreover, she said that when they came to the settlement (research area), they had no relatives there, so she seldom attended marriage ceremonies. Consequently, she had not learned how to assess dowries. According to her account, I noted that when female guests go to a marriage ceremony, they evaluate the dowry and talk about it at the banquet.

Why do women assess dowries? My explanation is based on the following case. At a settlement in Chiyal, Oysat, who lived in Chiyal, and I attended a marriage ceremony. Two brothers were each marrying. Oysat said that the grooms' family had become rich since the two sons had begun working in Tashkent. The elder brother's bride was from a rich family, but the younger brother's was from a standard family. Oysat looked at each dowry and then evaluated the brides' closets. According to Oysat, the closet of the younger brother's bride was very nice, but the other closet was not so nice. The



closet of the younger brother's bride was priced at approximately 15,000,000 sum, while the other's was priced at approximately 13,000,000 or 14,000,000 sum. It seems that the parents of the younger brother's bride had bought an expensive closet so as not to be embarrassed. In other words, dowries show how eager hosts (both bride and groom's parents) are, and the wedding guests form an impression of their eagerness from the price of the dowries. In short, wedding guests pay attention to dowries bought at the bazaar with cash.

To summarize, first, people in the area see marriage as a duty. Second, they recognize that marriage ceremonies show the hosts' economic power. This means that hosts must make the marriage ceremonies as beautiful as possible so as not to bring shame on the family. Therefore, I suspect that a disparity between people who can marry easily and people who cannot marry is appearing in rural areas.

### 3) A sign of change? The case of Feruza's marriage

Then, we might ask, if there is marital disparity, how do people who cannot easily marry find a marriage partner? To answer, I will describe the process of Feruza's marriage. Feruza was unmarried due to her unfortunate family situation. She did not have a supporter who could help her arrange a marriage because her mother had passed away and her father was *o'qimagan*, meaning "not studied" in Uzbek. A niece of Urus, Sharaf's wife, she was working as a helper at Sharaf's house. As mentioned previously, women in the area generally marry at around 18 years old, so because Feruza was 25, she was in danger of having missed the opportunity. Despite the challenge of her family situation, in October 2010, Feruza married a younger man whom she "dated" by mobile phone. Her case represents a new marriage process enabled by the growing tourist industry, widespread technology, and the transition to a market economy.

Sharaf's family makes and sells hand loomed rugs for foreign tourists. Their business is rare, in that they make handlooms only in the settlement, without running a shop in a tourist city. However, their success can be attributed to their location. An asphalt road connecting Samarkand and Shahrisabz, two popular tourist cities in Uzbekistan, runs in front of Sharaf's house, and therefore, many sightseeing buses pass the house.

The handloom business was begun in 1998. When Sharaf's fourth daughter was weaving a carpet at home, a bus of Korean tourists happened to pass. Catching sight of her weaving the carpet, a tourist stopped the bus and came to the house. The Korean tourist bought the carpet from Sharaf, and that was how the business began. After that, foreign tourists sometimes bought handlooms, and as a result, the family business grew little by little. Now, during the busy season, April and May, and again from August to November, foreign tourists visit almost every day. Sharaf built a handloom factory where young women, about 20 years old, make handlooms. Sharaf's family are often featured in newspapers, journals, and on television, so they are famous not only in Chiroqchi district, but also throughout Uzbekistan.

To return to Feruza's marriage—it is quite novel. In the area even now, arranged marriage is common. However, Feruza met her husband Zafar through her friend Gulmila who worked at the handloom factory. Gulmila gave her Zafar's mobile phone number. Feruza associated with Zafar by mobile phone, and, eventually, they married. Mobile phones were introduced to the area around 2003, and they spread rapidly among the populace. Young women who work at the handloom factory often buy clothing and mobile phones; they then receive young men's telephone numbers from their friends. They talk with their "telephone boyfriends," as Feruza did. In other words, Feruza's marriage was realized through creation of waged work for unmarried women in response to expanding tourism and the transition to a market economy.

Furthermore, not only Feruza's way of meeting her husband, but also their marriage process is novel. For example, Sharaf's family received a marriage proposal from a go-between, but in Feruza's case, the marriage proposal came from the groom's (Zagfar's) parents, with Feruza's father being consulted. At the first visit, the groom's parents strongly desired to meet Feruza, so she appeared before the *sovchi*. In general, a prospective bride should never appear before the parents of a prospective groom. In addition, Feruza was older than Zafar, and as a result of the meeting, Zafar's parents decided to announce Feruza's age as less than it actually was. They would decide whether to proceed with the marriage after Feruza and Zafar met. For the second visit, Zafar came to Sharaf's house with his parents. When Feruza met Zafar, they decided to proceed with the marriage, with everyone's consensus. Anora said that in general, before marriage, a prospective groom never officially visits the bride's house. Sharaf's younger brother reflected on this process and remarked that all past marriages were *antic*, meaning old-fashioned. Thus, the marriage process itself seems to be changing due to new and different living conditions.

In this way, Feruza married Zafar. After they were married, she stopped using her mobile phone. Feruza explained, "Now, a mobile phone is not necessary for me. My father-in-law has a mobile phone; it is enough. So you can call my father-in-law if you want to talk to me."

Feruza's marriage demonstrates that the marriage process is changing. As I have explained, Feruza had problems finding a marriage partner due to her family situation. Evaluation of the bride's family by the groom's is an important point in the search for a bride. However, Feruza arranged her own marriage using a mobile phone, bypassing the usual social evaluation of the family. Certainly some significant social changes occurred as background to her marriage. Sharaf began offering handloom weaving as paid work to single women, and weavers can now purchase goods, such as clothing and mobile phones, with their wages. In other words, the transition to the market economy in rural life enabled Feruza to be independently involved in arranging her own marriage. Yet Feruza stopped using her mobile phone. Thus, she recognized her novel marriage process not as an ongoing way of living as an independent woman, but as a new way of achieving marriage and becoming a traditional wife.

## ■ 6. Conclusion

I have shown that in the rural area where I conducted field research, people compete to find good marriage partners and to hold expensive marriage ceremonies. As part of this competition, women are expected to be "good girls" and to come from "good families," based on traditional images of women and families. Conversely, men are expected to have economic power. I believe that this situation means some people have difficulty securing marriages. However, the growing importance of marriage as a safety net and the increasing quantity of manufactured goods also present new opportunities for arranging marriages. Furthermore, we see signs of changes in the way a prospective marriage partner is found. At this time, I believe that the new way of arranging marriage does not reform marriage customs or women's lives, but rather helps women gain a "good" status based on traditional values.

Although this paper depicts some interesting and illustrative examples, more information is needed. I would like to conduct further research, especially analyzing the concepts of "good girl" and "good family"; I would also like to verify the relationship between "good status" and marital disparity.

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